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MEMOIR

OF

JOSEPH GRINNELL.

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To Hon.ble Robt. C. Winthrop

With the regards & great respect of

His Friend

Wm. Grimshaw

May 4th 1863

MEMOIR

OF

JOSEPH GRINNELL.

READ AT A DINNER

AT

WILLIAM T. RUSSELL'S,

ON THE 7th DAY OF MARCH,

1863.

Boston
D. Clapp & Son Printers
1863

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MEMOIR.

At a social meeting of some of the friends of our fellow citizen, Joseph Grinnell, where the prominent interests of our city were freely discussed, attention was turned to the fact, that in most of the late improvements which have resulted in the prosperity of New Bedford, to no one were we so much indebted for the completion of various valuable institutions as to our above-named friend; and a general desire was expressed that the prominent features of his life—especially since he voluntarily abandoned a most lucrative and honorable position in the city of New York, where great wealth seemed to be awaiting his prosperous pursuit, to return

to his native town, possessing a moderate competency, and here to devote himself to the friendships of his earliest days, and join hands with those who were contributing their time and means to the substantial improvement and adorning of their native city —might be obtained.

A committee was thereupon requested to obtain the date of his return, and also the dates which marked the principal incidents in relation to the material interests of his native place since his return; together with an account of the services which he has so faithfully performed for the benefit of the community at large.

The committee has been gratified by the courteous reply to its inquiries, and are thus enabled to furnish the statements that all were anxious to receive, which are embodied as follows.

Mr. GRINNELL was born in New Bedford, Mass., in a small brick house in Water Street, which appears to be one of the earliest landmarks of the old town (and no one seems to know who was the builder thereof), on the 17th of November, 1788. He resided for twenty years of his early manhood in the city of New York, in active business as a commission merchant in company with his uncle, JOHN H. HOWLAND, under the firm of "HOWLAND & GRINNELL," from 1810 to 1814; with PRESERVED FISH, under the firm of "FISH & GRINNELL," from 1815 to 1825; and with his brothers HENRY and MOSES GRINNELL, under the firm of "FISH, GRINNELL & Co.," from 1825 to 1829. Some sketch of these various firms, it is understood, we are to have in a work now being prepared by PELATIAH PERRITT, Esq., President of the Chamber of Commerce of that city, entitled "The Commerce and Merchants

of New York." Mr. GRINNELL retired from the firm of "FISH, GRINNELL & Co.," in January, 1829, leaving an extensive and profitable business. His health being impaired, he then, with Mrs. GRINNELL and his adopted daughter (now Mrs. N. P. WILLIS), made a visit to Europe, and returned in the autumn of 1830. After which, with the full approval of Mrs. GRINNELL, who at first had doubts, he determined to return to his native town and pass the remainder of his days. To this happy conclusion the citizens of New Bedford will ever have cause to acknowledge the benefits derived from the energy and honesty of a single individual when exerted for the common good. Mr. GRINNELL'S first attention was directed to the building of a house to live in, and he was fortunate in obtaining a beautiful location, commanding a fine view of Buzzard's Bay, and which had attracted his admiration in younger days. Those who are old enough

to remember that waste spot in the outskirts of the old town, cannot fail to be struck by the contrast now presented. It is transformed into one of the ornaments of the city.

In 1831 we find our friend permanently established among us, restored to health, and again entering upon active business. He then caused to be built for himself and others, two first-class ships, of live-oak and locust — the "Oneida" and "George Washington" — the former for a China trader, and the latter for a packet-ship between New York and Liverpool. Both proved to be superior and successful vessels. The George Washington continued in the packet business for twelve years, being a longer term than is usually allowed for any vessel to remain, where fancy and utility are necessarily combined to retain popularity, in a trade subject to the most exciting competition; and as a proof of superiority during these

twelve years, the underwriters were never called upon to pay a cent for damage to her many valuable cargoes. That proved her strength and excellence. In sailing she was not deficient. On one occasion, in consequence of easterly gales, a dozen European packet-ships were detained below New York, and great was the rivalry as to the shortest passage. The George Washington won. That the Oneida was also a success, it is only necessary to state that she is at this moment on a passage from China. These ships were both built by JETHRO and ZACHARIAH HILLMAN.

In 1832 the Marine Bank was established, and Mr. GRINNELL was unexpectedly (to himself) elected to the Presidency. He has held the office now for more than thirty years, and the Bank has ever done a safe and successful business.

In 1838 it was proposed to build a Railroad from New Bedford to Taunton, to

perfect the lines between New Bedford, Providence and Boston. This was an enterprise which met with but little encouragement from capitalists; and those engaged in stage lines, foreseeing the destruction of their business, closed their books to those who were in search of statistics to ascertain the feasibility of the plan, from an estimate of the travel by the established lines of egress from the city. But to this project Mr. GRINNELL gave his hearty support, and early in 1839 a company was organized, and, when a charter was granted, the Presidency was pressed upon this indefatigable laborer in the cause. He accepted the office, in the hope of throwing it off when the road was completed.

It was finished July 1, 1840, for less than the estimated cost, and before the appointed time. But Mr. GRINNELL has never been "relieved." This enterprise has proved emi-

nently successful, and has been of vast advantage to this city.

In 1838 Mr. GRINNELL was elected one of the Council of Massachusetts — EDWARD EVERETT being Governor. In 1839 he was re-elected to the office — MARCUS MORTON being Governor; and in 1840 he was again elected — JOHN DAVIS being Governor. Thus, during the administration of various parties, he faithfully served the Commonwealth, and with peculiar fitness was placed each year on the Committee of Accounts, and we may safely say there was in those years no embezzlement of the people's money.

In 1840 Mr. GRINNELL was chosen a Director of the Boston & Providence Railroad, and in 1841 President thereof. This position brought him in contact with some of the prominent men of Boston; amongst others, WILLIAM STURGIS, NATHAN and WILLIAM APPLETON, ABBOT LAWRENCE, and others. His intercourse with them was

of the most friendly character, and from them he derived much valuable information. No doubt he was equally able to impart much in return. This presidency he resigned in 1846, leaving the Corporation in a prosperous condition.

He retained the office of Director in the Company until January, 1863, when he declined a re-election, and received a unanimous vote of thanks for his long and faithful services.

In 1843 Mr. GRINNELL was elected a member of the 27th Congress, to fill the vacancy occasioned by the death of BARKER BURNELL, of Nantucket. He was returned at the three succeeding elections, making altogether a service of eight years in the House of Representatives. He declined being a candidate for another election. If he had any opponents at these several elections, their names are forgotten. The first Committee on which he was appointed, was that

of "Post Offices and Post Roads." On this he labored zealously for the reduction of postage. He prepared the first tables showing the amount of postage collected in each State, and the amount paid for transporting the mails in the same, so that the gain or loss could be seen at a glance.

In conjunction with Mr. DANA, of New York, he made a report to the House, recommending the reduction of postage on a single letter to five cents, which after much discussion and excitement was adopted, and it became a law. Subsequently he was placed on the Committee of Commerce, and Chairman thereof. Here was a position in which it might emphatically be said he was "at home;" but the first place on the committee he soon yielded to a political friend of higher aspirations. This friend was WASHINGTON HUNT, who afterwards was elected Governor of the State of New York.

Nevertheless he did not relax his labors

in the Committee, and continued his services on the same to the end of his last official term.

During these several terms of Congressional service, the election to which was neither bought or sought for, Mr. GRINNELL drew up, reported and carried through the House of Representatives many bills of national importance. The reduction of postage has already been mentioned. He obtained the first appropriation for building and placing Life Boats at exposed points on the sea-coast, together with the apparatus necessary for the saving of persons shipwrecked, the success of which has fully proved the wisdom of the appropriation. Another important bill was for the ventilation of passenger ships, and other arrangements to promote the comfort and health of the passengers. This met with serious opposition from ship-owners, some of whom were his own relatives, and some were his constituents.

Others, again, throwing aside *apparent* self-interest, encouraged him to persevere. This bill, much to the satisfaction of Mr. GRINNELL, after a severe struggle, passed successfully through the House and the Senate, and received the approval of President POLK. It now remains on the Statute Book without any material alteration. Soon after it was put in force, *ship-fever disappeared*, and it is now admitted by all to be a useful and wholesome law. Moreover, it has drawn from persons connected with the British Government an acknowledgment of its excellent provisions, and that we were in advance of them in philanthropic care for their emigrants.

One other bill introduced by Mr. GRINNELL may be mentioned, which has proved of great value to ship-owners. It provided for the recording of Bills of Sale and Mortgages of Vessels, giving to this class of property the same perfection of title as that to real estate.

This met with some opposition from the Executive department, on the ground that it could not be executed; yet it became a law, and has proved, by long experience, not only to be very useful, but without difficulty in its enforcement.

We now enter upon a new phase of Mr. GRINNELL'S business transactions, which shows his practical judgment and foresight. Only when time and circumstances concur to promise a successful result, has he been induced to enter upon any enterprise, however tempting the prospect.

In 1845, when the manufacture of cotton was very profitable, he was strongly urged to take part in the erection of a Cotton Mill in New Bedford. This he declined, on the ground that the high prices which ruled in every department of the enterprise, presented nothing but prospective disappointment. But he was fully convinced that the time had come, when a part of the accumulated capital

which had been derived from the whale fishery should be diverted from that special business, and invested in manufacturing and other objects that would prove more profitable.

In 1847 a reaction in manufacturing occurred. Then Mr. GRINNELL urged his friends to unite in the erection of a Cotton Mill. After great effort a capital of one hundred and sixty thousand dollars was subscribed, and a company under the title of the "Wamsutta Mills" was organized.

Here again, after the act of incorporation was obtained, the Presidency was thrust upon him; for whatever distrust he might feel in regard to taking the responsibility, his copartners were determined to take no refusal.

A lot of land was purchased, with a supply of water, of BENJAMIN RODMAN, with whom and the New Bedford & Taunton Railroad Corporation many liberal and advantageous arrangements were made, so that the mill was connected with the Railroad and tide-

water, to its great convenience and profit. The stock of the corporation has been increased from time to time, until it now amounts to one million of dollars. It has made liberal dividends, after paying all taxes and retaining sufficient means to meet all depreciation in the value of buildings and machinery.

In passing, it may be remarked that the dividends of this company have amounted to one hundred and forty-eight and a half per cent. up to this time.

But Mr. GRINNELL does not claim for himself the merit of this success. To THOMAS BENNETT, Jr., the Agent and Engineer of the establishment, he attributes the high reputation of the goods manufactured, and considers that the stockholders are largely indebted for their profits to his constant attention and skill. So with all the institutions over which he presides, he acknowledges the aid of honest and efficient boards

of directors, who have lightened his labors and shared his responsibility. And at the present time, neither of the corporations of which he is President stands upon the records as plaintiff or defendant.

Thus the Committee has endeavored to trace the successful progress of the various institutions inaugurated and completed by the perseverance of Mr. GRINNELL; and it may be instructive to inquire by what means he has been able to concentrate these millions so as to make them minister to the prosperity of our city, and increase the comforts as well as the fortunes of our citizens. It finds a ready answer in the happy constitution of mind which has always adapted the proper means to the end in view. Without depending upon fortuitous circumstances to produce desirable results, he, like a prudent man "about to build a house, first counts the cost." By this method he has been able to

demonstrate to the most scrutinizing capitalist what might be deemed *just* expectations, and those dependent upon figures could read their "title clear" to remunerative dividends; whilst others, less disposed to investigate closely, seeing the cautious steps which have marked his course through life, have been content to risk here and there a portion of their substance upon the acknowledged caution and honesty of the agent employed; and both of these classes, as events have proved, have had their anticipations more than realized.

And now, were we merely reviewing Mr. GRINNELL's business career, we might bring this Memoir to a close; but when we remember that we are all closely associated with its subject, in relations of courtesy and hospitality, which have been long enjoyed, the current of thought is changed, and we are painfully reminded that one event of the last year cannot fail to excite our deepest

sympathy. That year closed and the new year dawned; but it brought not the happy welcome the day is wont to call forth. The home of our friend was bereaved. One, who for fifty years had shared with him cheerfully and lovingly the toils and cares of life, and had gracefully extended that cordial hospitality which gave pleasure to all who entered their dwelling, was no longer there! She departed as she lived, at peace with all. Impressed with the idea that her days were few, she sent greetings of affectionate remembrance to all her friends, and as if that was too limited for her unbounded affection, exclaimed, "Give my love to all the world!" And in beautiful accordance with the spirit in which she lived, the words of St. John — "If we love another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us" — mark the spot where now she rests.

But our Friend "still lives," and though the shadows of evening are gathering about

him, yet we know that "The evening and morning were the first day," and long may the *day* last in which he may "work," as before, for the honor and prosperity of his native home — New Bedford.

The foregoing Memoir was prepared, as stated in the introduction, at the suggestion of a few of the personal friends of the Hon. JOSEPH GRINNELL, who — by his eminence among the merchants of the country, and by the value of his services in the public councils, acquired and enhanced by his ability, his knowledge of affairs, and the stability and weight of his character — reflects so much honor on his native town, and who, by his generous and elegant hospitality, has done so much to extend its good name and fame among strangers.

This outline sketch of an honorable and useful life, whose honor and usefulness are

still recognized and felt in the efficient and genial activities of our business and social circles, is but a bare statement of events, and contains all that is proper to make at present a matter of record.

May the time be very distant when it will become suitable and appropriate for his friends to gather together and complete it, as a Biography of a finished career — when they may do full justice to the divers phases of his character, and give due credit to his admirable consistency in following out the high purpose and plan of life which he conceived and prescribed to himself in early manhood.

At a pleasant social gathering on the seventh of March, A.D. 1863, around the hospitable and well-appointed dinner-table of William T. Russell, the Memoir was read, and approved by the company.

The occasion upon which its preparation was suggested was at a dinner-party, given by

Mr. BENJAMIN RODMAN, a few weeks previous, the guests at which were Mrs. W. C. N. SWIFT and Miss ELIZABETH RUSSELL; Messrs.

JOSEPH GRINNELL, WILLIAM T. RUSSELL,
JOSEPH C. DELANO, WILLIAM J. ROTCH,
JOSHUA C. STONE, CHAS S. RANDALL,
and LEANDER PLUMMER.

Those present at Mr. RUSSELL'S, when the Memoir was presented by Mr. BENJAMIN RODMAN, to whom its preparation had been committed, were, besides Mr. RUSSELL, his daughter ELIZABETH and his son GILBERT RUSSELL, Messrs.

JOSEPH GRINNELL, BENJAMIN RODMAN,
WILLIAM ALMY, JOHN H. CLIFFORD,
WILLIAM J. ROTCH, W. C. N. SWIFT,
E. C. JONES, J. C. STONE,
LAWRENCE GRINNELL, CHAS. S. RANDALL,
and CHARLES L. WOOD.

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